

Fencerow habitat & headquarters areas

Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Division of Forestry



Shrubby growth along fencerows provides escape cover and travel lanes for quail, rabbits, songbirds and other small wildlife. Habitat can be created by allowing areas along fences to grow up into briars and tree seedlings, and/or by planting species favored by wildlife.

Periodic mowing will renew fencerow habitat. Mowing on a rotational schedule will prevent brush from becoming too large to cut easily and will maintain well-distributed habitat in all stages of development. One fourth of the fence lines might be mowed annually.

The habitat value of a line of fairly mature trees along a fence can be greatly enhanced by expanding it with rows of shrubby food and cover species. Keeping the shrub row at least one bush-hog/disk width away from the actual fence will allow easy maintenance of the fence. The space between fence and brush can serve as a food plot. Total width should be at least 15 feet.

Cutting larger (6" +) trees can improve some fencerows. The stumps will send up numerous brushy sprouts, which make good cover. The treetops can be left in the game strip, where they too will provide cover. Mast producing trees such as oaks, ash or black cherry should be left uncut.

Good wildlife shrubs or trees include autumn olive, wild plum, gray and flowering dogwood, crab apple, hawthorns, sassafras, indigo bush, persimmon, blackberry, grape, sumacs, mulberries, elderberries, serviceberry, greenbriar, poison ivy, redcedar, oaks, hickories, beech, maples, cherry, pines, holly, blackgum, elm and ash. These are generally planted on a 6x8 foot spacing two to three rows wide. Lespedeza is a smaller shrub that provides excellent cover and late winter food for quail and other birds. Bicolor, Thunberg's, Korean or Amquail are good choices. Lespedeza can be grown from seed or seedlings. Plant seedlings every 18 inches in three or more rows on a three-foot spacing.

Ideally, any point in an area managed for quail should be within covey flush distance (100 yards) of

cover. Fencerow habitat areas might need protection from grazing until vegetation is well established.

"Headquarter areas" are clumps of dense shrubby vegetation with good overhead cover and shady open ground below. They are used for loafing and dusting by coveys of quail. They are best utilized if they are located where three or four habitat types come together (field, weeds, brush, forest etc.) The number of these areas can determine how many coveys a particular farm will support. Wild plum, dogwoods, crabapples and hawthorns are highly desirable for headquarter areas. Evergreens (redcedar, holly, Virginia pine, white pine, etc.) provide important winter cover, plus excellent dove nesting areas. Clumps should be 1/4 to 1/2 acre in size and be connected to (or near) other good cover.

(Adapted from the Kentucky Division of Forestry.)
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